

Message Text

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17

ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EB-03 SR-02 ORM-01 SAM-01 CU-02

H-01 INR-05 L-01 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 RSC-01 /042 W

----- 024673

R 290543Z NOV 74

FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3024

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 12912

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CH, HK

SUBJECT: HONG KONG GOVERNMENT CONDITIONS PUBLIC RE REFUGEE PROBLEM

SUMMARY. WITHOUT INDICATING PUBLICLY WHAT MOVES IT MAY BE CONTEMPLATING, THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT (HKG) HAS RECENTLY DIRECTED CONSIDERABLE PRESS ATTENTION TO THE BURDENS THE HEAVY INFLUX OF IMMIGRATION FROM CHINA IS IMPOSING UPON THE COLONY AND THE RESULTANT NEED TO TAKE CORRECTIVE ACTION. THE HKG'S PURPOSE APPEARS NOT ONLY ONE OF CONDITIONING ITS PUBLIC TO POSSIBLE IMMIGRATION POLICY CHANGES BUT TO PROVIDE THE PUBLIC WITH A RATIONALE TO RESPOND TO POSSIBLE FOREIGN CRITICISM.

END SUMMARY.

1. A NUMBER OF ARTICLES AND EDITORIALS, FOCUSED ON THE PROBLEMS HONG KONG FACES FROM THE IMMIGRATION INFLUX FROM CHINA, HAVE APPEARED RECENTLY IN BOTH THE CHINESE AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS. SEVERAL ARTICLES BEAR CLEAR SIGNS OF HAVING BEEN INSPIRED BY THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT (HKG), WITH THE INFORMATION AND
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DATA DISCUSSED SOURCED TO HERETOFORE CONFIDENTIAL HKG REPORTS.

ADDITIONALLY SEVERAL BRITISH JOURNALISTS HAVE RECENTLY INDICATED TO CONGENOFFS THAT BASED ON AUTHORITATIVE BACKGROUND BRIEFINGS THEY HAVE RECEIVED ON THE SITUATION THEY ANTICIPATE THERE WILL BE CHANGES IN HKG IMMIGRATION POLICIES.

2. THUS A FRONT PAGE NOVEMBER 19 ARTICLE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST (SCMP), DRAWING LIBERALLY FROM A CONFIDENTIAL HKG STUDY, DESCRIBED HOW THE CONTINUING IMMIGRATION FLOW WAS STRAINING HONG KONG'S ECONOMIC RESOURCES, HOW "FREEDOM SWIMMERS" (ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS) WERE NOW COMING IN THE GREATEST NUMBER SINCE 1962 AND HOW HONG KONG RESIDENTS WERE LOSING OUT ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS BECAUSE OF THE REFUGEE-RELATED FINANCIAL BURDEN AND OVER CROWDING. THE ARTICLE CONCLUDED THAT THE COMBINATION OF THE COLONY'S ECONOMIC RECESSION, THE HIGH RATE OF IMMIGRATION FLOW AND RESULTANT SOCIAL AND BUDGET PROBLEMS HAD NOW CREATED A "CRITICAL" SITUATION. THE REACTIONS OF LOCAL CHINESE COMMUNITY LEADERS TO SUCH PROBLEMS WERE SUBSEQUENTLY REPORTED BY SCMP, WITH MOST LEADERS EXPRESSING GRAVE CONCERN OVER THE PRESENT TREND. ONE LEGISLATIVE COUNCILLOR WAS QUOTED AS ADVOCATING A TOTAL BAN OF CHINESE IMMIGRANTS INTO THE COLONY, WHILE ANOTHER CONTENDED THAT HONG KONG COULD NO LONGER AFFORD HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATIONS IN THE FACE OF PRESENT SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES. SEVERAL OTHERS CALLED FOR CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN THE PRC AND THE HKG TO REMEDY THE SITUATION.

3. ONE OF THE FEW OPPOSING VIEWS VOICED THUS FAR WAS A NOVEMBER 20 EDITORIAL IN THE PRO-TAIWAN TIEN TIEN ER PAO WHICH ARGUED AGAINST REFUSING HAVEN TO "THOSE BRAVE PEOPLE SEEKING FREEDOM" AND WHICH CALLED IN GENERAL TERMS AND ON HUMANITARIAN AND MORAL GROUNDS FOR A MORE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO CARE FOR "REFUGEES."

4. A NOVEMBER 21 EDITORIAL IN MING PAO, A MASS CIRCULATION AND WELL RESPECTED INDEPENDENT, SEEMED AIMED AS A PARTIAL RESPONSE TO THE PRO-TAIWAN POSITION. INTERESTINGLY IT FOCUSED SPECIFICALLY ON THE PROBLEM OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS. NOTING THAT THE PRESENT TOTAL INFLUX OF LEGALS AND ILLEGALS OF 50,000 A YEAR CONSTITUTED MORE THAN ONE PERCENT OF HONG KONG'S PRESENT POPULATION, THE PAPER DECLARED THAT NO COUNTRY NOR AREA COULD ACCEPT SUCH A HIGH YEARLY IMMIGRATION INFLUX. MING PAO OBSERVED

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THAT SHOULD HONG KONG REFUSE TO ACCEPT FURTHER ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS FROM THE PRC, TAIWAN WOULD PROBABLY CRITICIZE SUCH ACTION. THE EDITORIAL THEN ASKED RHETORICALLY WHETHER TAIWAN ITSELF WOULD ACCEPT A COMPARABLE INFLUX OF 150,000 IMMIGRANTS A YEAR OR FOR THAT MATTER EVEN A YEARLY INFLUX OF 15,000 IMMIGRANTS FROM HONG KONG. POINTING OUT THAT HONG KONG HAD UP TO 1967 FREQUENTLY SENT BACK ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS TO THE PRC, THE EDITORIAL OBSERVED THAT THE PRC AND HONG KONG HAVE A COMMON

INTEREST IN STOPPING THE FLOW OF ILLEGALS.

5. THE EDITORIAL TOOK NOTE OF THE ARGUMENT THAT SINCE HONG KONG WAS CONSIDERED TO BE A CHINESE TERRITORY, THE HKG THEREFORE DID NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO REFUSE ENTRY TO CHINESE PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY CAME LEGALLY OR ILLEGALLY. SIMILARLY IT NOTED THE ARGUMENT THAT SHOULD THE PRC ACCEPT ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS EXPATRIATED BY THE HKG, SUCH ACTION WOULD BE TANTAMOUNT TO PRC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE HKG RIGHT TO REFUSE ENTRY TO CHINESE PEOPLE AND BY THIS TOKEN CONSTITUTE PRC RECOGNITION THAT HONG KONG IS FOREIGN TERRITORY. THE EDITORIAL THEN REFUTED BOTH ARGUMENTS BY POINTING OUT THAT WITHIN CHINA ITSELF ANY CHANGE OF DOMICILE MUST BE APPROVED BY CONCERNED AUTHORITIES. THUS WHEN A RESIDENT IN CANTON DESIRES TO MOVE TO PEKING, APPROVAL NOT ONLY FROM CANTON AUTHORITIES BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY FROM PEKING AUTHORITIES WAS NECESSARY BEFORE THE MOVE COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED. THIS WAS BECAUSE OF THE VARIOUS ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS INVOLVING HOUSING, FOOD RATIONING, EDUCATION, WORK, ETC. HENCE, ARGUED MING PAO, REFUSAL TO ADMIT ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS DID NOT INVOLVE THE ISSUE OF SOVEREIGNTY BUT ONLY ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS.

6. COMMENT. THE HKG HAS NOT REVEALED PUBLICLY WHAT MOVES IT MAY BE CONTEMPLATING WITH REGARD TO THE IMMIGRATION INFLUX FROM CHINA. HOWEVER IN STIMULATING PRESS DISCUSSION AND IN AIRING PUBLICLY THE VARIOUS COMPLEX ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM (PARTICULARLY THE SOPHISTICATED MING PAO DISCUSSION) THE HKG SEEMS NOT ONLY TO BE CONDITIONING ITS PUBLIC TO THE POSSIBILITY OF IMMIGRATION POLICY CHANGES BUT ALSO PROVIDING THE PUBLIC WITH A RATIONALE TO RESPOND TO POSSIBLE FOREIGN CRITICISM.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, POLICIES, PRESS COMMENTS, POLITICAL SITUATION, IMMIGRATION LAW
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 NOV 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MorefiRH
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974HONGK12912
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740346-0382
From: HONG KONG
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974114/aaaaacpx.tel
Line Count: 145
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MorefiRH
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 JUN 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 JUN 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <26 DEC 2002 by MorefiRH>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HONG KONG GOVERNMENT CONDITIONS PUBLIC RE REFUGEE PROBLEM SUMMARY. WITHOUT INDICATING PUBLICLY WHAT MOVES IT MAY BE
TAGS: PFOR, CH, HK
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005